

## CHAPTER LXXVI

Some Pleasant, Shady Talk In The Groves, Between My Lords Abrazza And Media, Babbalanja, Mohi, And Yoomy

Abrazza had a cool retreat--a grove of dates; where we were used to lounge of noons, and mix our converse with the babble of the rills; and mix our punches in goblets chased with grapes. And as ever, King Abrazza was the prince of hosts.

"Your crown," he said to Media; and with his own, he hung it on a bough.

"Be not ceremonious:" and stretched his royal legs upon the turf.

"Wine!" and his pages poured it out.

So on the grass we lounged; and King Abrazza, who loved his antique ancestors; and loved old times; and would not talk of moderns;--bade Yoomy sing old songs; bade Mohi rehearse old histories; bade Babbalanja tell of old ontologies; and commanded all, meanwhile, to drink his old, old wine.

So, all round we quaffed and quoted.

At last, we talked of old Homeric bards:--those who, ages back,

harped, and begged, and groped their blinded way through all this charitable Mardi; receiving coppers then, and immortal glory now.

ABRAZZA--How came it, that they all were blind?

BABBALANJA--It was endemical, your Highness. Few grand poets have good eyes; for they needs blind must be, who ever gaze upon the sun.

Vavona himself was blind:

when, in the silence of his secret bower, he said--"I will build another world. Therein, let there be kings and slaves, philosophers and wits; whose checkered actions--strange, grotesque, and merry-sad, will entertain my idle moods." So, my lord, Vavona played at kings and crowns, and men and manners; and loved that lonely game to play.

ABRAZZA--Vavona seemed a solitary Mardian; who seldom went abroad; had few friends; and shunning others, was shunned by them.

BABBALANJA--But shunned not himself, my lord; like gods, great poets dwell alone; while round them, roll the worlds they build.

MEDIA--You seem to know all authors:--you must have heard of Lombardo, Babbalanja; he who flourished many ages since.

BABBALANJA--I have; and his grand Kortanza know by heart.

MEDIA (to Abrazza.)--A very curious work, that, my lord.

ABRAZZA--Yes, my dearest king. But, Babbalanja, if Lombardo had aught to tell to Mardi--why choose a vehicle so crazy?

BABBALANJA--It was his nature, I suppose.

ABRAZZA--But so it would not have been, to me.

BABBALANJA--Nor would it have been natural, for my noble lord Abrazza, to have worn Lombardo's head:--every man has his own, thank Oro!

ABRAZZA--A curious work: a very curious work. Babbalanja, are you acquainted with the history of Lombardo?

BABBALANJA--None better. All his biographies have I read.

ABRAZZA--Then, tell us how he came to write that work. For one, I can not imagine how those poor devils contrive to roll such thunders through all Mardi.

MEDIA--Their thunder and lightning seem spontaneous combustibles, my lord.

ABRAZZA--With which, they but consume themselves, my prince beloved.

BABBALANJA--In a measure, true, your Highness. But pray you, listen; and I will try to tell the way in which Lombardo produced his great Kortanza.

MEDIA--But hark you, philosopher! this time no incoherencies; gag that devil, Azzageddi. And now, what was it that originally impelled Lombardo to the undertaking?

BABBALANJA--Primus and forever, a full heart:--brimful, bubbling, sparkling; and running over like the flagon in your hand, my lord. Secundo, the necessity of bestirring himself to procure his yams.

ABRAZZA--Wanting the second motive, would the first have sufficed, philosopher?

BABBALANJA--Doubtful. More conduits than one to drain off the soul's overflowings. Besides, the greatest fullnesses overflow not spontaneously; and, even when decanted, like rich syrups, slowly ooze; whereas, poor fluids glibly flow, wide-spreading. Hence, when great fullness weds great indolence;--that man, to others, too often proves a cipher; though, to himself, his thoughts form an Infinite Series, indefinite, from its vastness; and incommunicable;--not for lack of power, but for lack of an omnipotent volition, to move his strength. His own world is full before him; the fulcrum set; but lever there is none. To such a man, the giving of any boor's resoluteness, with tendons braided, would be as hanging a claymore to Valor's side,

before unarmed. Our minds are cunning, compound mechanisms; and one spring, or wheel, or axle wanting, the movement lags, or halts.

Cerebrum must not overbalance cerebellum; our brains should be round as globes; and planted on capacious chests, inhaling mighty morning-inspirations. We have had vast developments of parts of men; but none of manly wholes. Before a full-developed man, Mardi would fall down and worship. We are idiot, younger-sons of gods, begotten in dotages divine; and our mothers all miscarry. Giants are in our germs; but we are dwarfs, staggering under heads overgrown. Heaped, our measures burst. We die of too much life.

MEDIA (to Abrazza)--Be not impatient, my lord; he'll recover presently. You were talking of Lombardo, Babbalanja.

BABBALANJA--I was, your Highness. Of all Mardians, by nature, he was the most inert. Hast ever seen a yellow lion, all day basking in the yellow sun:--in reveries, rending droves of elephants; but his vast loins supine, and eyelids winking? Such, Lombardo; but fierce Want, the hunter, came and roused his roar. In hairy billows, his great mane tossed like the sea; his eyeballs flamed two hells; his paw had stopped a rolling world.

ABRAZZA--In other words, yams were indispensable, and, poor devil, he roared to get them.

BABBALANJA (bowing)--Partly so, my literal lord. And as with your

own golden scepter, at times upon your royal teeth, indolent tattoos  
you beat; then, potent, sway it o'er your isle; so, Lombardo. And ere  
Necessity plunged spur and rowel into him, he knew not his own paces.  
That churned him into consciousness; and brought ambition, ere then  
dormant, seething to the top, till he trembled at himself. No mailed  
hand lifted up against a traveler in woods, can so, appall, as we  
ourselves. We are full of ghosts and spirits; we are as grave-yards  
full of buried dead, that start to life before us. And all our dead  
sires, verily, are in us; that is their immortality. From sire to  
son, we go on multiplying corpses in ourselves; for all of which, are  
resurrections. Every thought's a soul of some past poet, hero, sage.  
We are fuller than a city. Woe it is, that reveals these things. He  
knows himself, and all that's in him, who knows adversity. To scale  
great heights, we must come out of lowermost depths. The way to heaven  
is through hell. We need fiery baptisms in the fiercest flames of our  
own bosoms. We must feel our hearts hot--hissing in us. And ere  
their fire is revealed, it must burn its way out of us; though it  
consume us and itself. Oh, sleek-cheeked Plenty! smiling at thine own  
dimples;--vain for thee to reach out after greatness. Turn! turn! from  
all your tiers of cushions of eider-down--turn! and be broken on the  
wheels of many woes. At white-heat, brand thyself; and count the  
scars, like old war-worn veterans, over camp-fires. Soft poet!  
brushing tears from lilies--this way! and howl in sackcloth and in  
ashes! Know, thou, that the lines that live are turned out of a  
furrowed brow. Oh! there is a fierce, a cannibal delight, in the grief  
that shrieks to multiply itself. That grief is miserly of its own; it

pities all the happy. Some damned spirits would not be otherwise, could they.

ABRAZZA (to Media)--Pray, my lord, is this good gentleman a devil?

MEDIA.--No, my lord; but he's possessed by one. His name is Azzageddi. You may hear more of him. But come, Babbalanja, hast forgotten all about Lombardo? How set he about that great undertaking, his Kortanza?

ABRAZZA (to Media)--Oh, for all the ravings of your Babbalanja, Lombardo took no special pains; hence, deserves small commendation. For, genius must be somewhat like us kings,--calm, content, in consciousness of power. And to Lombardo, the scheme of his Kortanza must have come full-fledged, like an eagle from the sun.

BABBALANJA--No, your Highness; but like eagles, his thoughts were first callow; yet, born plumeless, they came to soar.

ABRAZZA--Very fine. I presume, Babbalanja, the first thing he did, was to fast, and invoke the muses.

BABBALANJA--Pardon, my lord; on the contrary he first procured a ream of vellum, and some sturdy quills: indispensable preliminaries, my worshipful lords, to the writing of the sublimest epics.

ABRAZZA--Ah! then the muses were afterward invoked.

BABBALANJA--Pardon again. Lombardo next sat down to a fine plantain pudding.

YOOMY--When the song-spell steals over me, I live upon olives.

BABBALANJA--Yoomy, Lombardo eschewed olives. Said he, "What fasting soldier can fight? and the fight of all fights is to write." In ten days Lombardo had written--

ABRAZZA--Dashed off, you mean.

BABBALANJA--He never dashed off aught.

ABRAZZA--As you will.

BABBALANJA--In ten days, Lombardo had written full fifty folios; he loved huge acres of vellum whereon to expatiate.

MEDIA--What then?

BABBALANJA--He read them over attentively; made a neat package of the whole: and put it into the fire.

ALL--How?



MEDIA--What! these great geniuses writing trash?

ABRAZZA--I thought as much.

BABBALANJA--My lords, they abound in it! more than any other men in Mardi. Genius is full of trash. But genius essays its best to keep it to itself; and giving away its ore, retains the earth; whence, the too frequent wisdom of its works, and folly of its life.

ABRAZZA--Then genius is not inspired, after all. How they must slave in their mines! I weep to think of it.

BABBALANJA--My lord, all men are inspired; fools are inspired; your highness is inspired; for the essence of all ideas is infused. Of ourselves, and in ourselves, we originate nothing. When Lombardo set about his work, he knew not what it would become. He did not build himself in with plans; he wrote right on; and so doing, got deeper and deeper into himself; and like a resolute traveler, plunging through baffling woods, at last was rewarded for his toils. "In good time," saith he, in his autobiography, "I came out into a serene, sunny, ravishing region; full of sweet scents, singing birds, wild plaints, roguish laughs, prophetic voices. "Here we are at last, then," he cried; "I have created the creative." And now the whole boundless landscape stretched away. Lombardo panted; the sweat was on his brow; he off mantle; braced himself; sat within view of the ocean; his face to a cool rushing breeze; placed flowers before him; and gave

himself plenty of room. On one side was his ream of vellum--

ABBRAZZA--And on the other, a brimmed beaker.

BABBALANJA--No, your Highness; though he loved it, no wine for Lombardo while actually at work.

MOHI--Indeed? Why, I ever thought that it was to the superior quality of Lombardo's punches, that Mardi was indebted for that abounding humor of his.

BABBALANJA--Not so; he had another way of keeping himself well braced.

YOOMY--Quick! tell us the secret.

BABBALANJA--He never wrote by rush-light. His lamp swung in heaven.-- He rose from his East, with the sun; he wrote when all nature was alive.

MOHI--Doubtless, then, he always wrote with a grin; and none laughed louder at his quips, than Lombardo himself.

BABBALANJA--Hear you laughter at the birth of a man child, old man? The babe may have many dimples; not so, the parent. Lombardo was a hermit to behold.

MEDIA--What! did Lombardo laugh with a long face?

BABBALANJA--His merriment was not always merriment to him, your Highness. For the most part, his meaning kept him serious. Then he was so intensely riveted to his work, he could not pause to laugh.

MOHI--My word for it; but he had a sly one, now and then.

BABBALANJA--For the nonce, he was not his own master: a mere amanuensis writing by dictation.

YOOMY--Inspiration, that!

BABBALANJA.--Call it as you will, Yoomy, it was a sort of sleep-walking of the mind. Lombardo never threw down his pen: it dropped from him; and then, he sat disenchanted: rubbing his eyes; staring; and feeling faint--sometimes, almost unto death.

MEDIA--But pray, Babbalanja, tell us how he made acquaintance with some of those rare worthies, he introduces us to, in his Koztanza.

BABBALANJA--He first met them in his reveries; they were walking about in him, sour and moody: and for a long time, were shy of his advances; but still importuned, they at last grew ashamed of their reserve; stepped forward; and gave him their hands. After that, they

were frank and friendly. Lombardo set places for them at his board; when he died, he left them something in his will.

MEDIA--What! those imaginary beings?

ABRAZZA--Wondrous witty! infernal fine!

MEDIA--But, Babbalanja; after all, the Koztanza found no favor in the eyes of some Mardians.

ABRAZZA--Ay: the arch-critics Verbi and Batho denounced it.

BABBALANJA--Yes: on good authority, Verbi is said to have detected a superfluous comma; and Batho declared that, with the materials he could have constructed a far better world than Lombardo's. But, didst ever hear of his laying his axis?

ABRAZZA--But the unities; Babbalanja, the unities! they are wholly wanting in the Koztanza.

BABBALANJA--Your Highness; upon that point, Lombardo was frank. Saith he, in his autobiography: "For some time, I endeavored to keep in the good graces of those nymphs; but I found them so captious, and exacting; they threw me into such a violent passion with their fault-findings; that, at last, I renounced them."

ABRAZZA--Very rash!

BABBALANJA--No, your Highness; for though Lombardo abandoned all monitors from without; he retained one autocrat within--his crowned and sceptered instinct. And what, if he pulled down one gross world, and ransacked the etherial spheres, to build up something of his own--a composite:--what then? matter and mind, though matching not, are mates; and sundered oft, in his Koztanza they unite:--the airy waist, embraced by stalwart arms.

MEDIA--Incoherent again! I thought we were to have no more of this!

BABBALANJA--My lord Media, there are things infinite in the finite; and dualities in unities. Our eyes are pleased with the redness of the rose, but another sense lives upon its fragrance. Its redness you must approach, to view: its invisible fragrance pervades the field. So, with the Koztanza. Its mere beauty is restricted to its form: its expanding soul, past Mardi does embalm. Modak is Modako; but fogle-fogle is not fogle-fi.

MEDIA (to Abrazza)--My lord, you start again; but 'tis only another phase of Azzageeddi; sometimes he's quite mad. But all this you must needs overlook.

ABRAZZA--I will, my dear prince; what one can not see through, one must needs look over, as you say.

YOOMY--But trust me, your Highness, some of those strange things fall far too melodiously upon the ear, to be wholly deficient in meaning.

ABRAZZA--Your gentle minstrel, this must be, my lord. But Babbalanja, the Koztanza lacks cohesion; it is wild, unconnected, all episode.

BABBALANJA--And so is Mardi itself--nothing but episodes; valleys and hills; rivers, digressing from plains; vines, roving all over; boulders and diamonds; flowers and thistles; forests and thickets; and, here and there, fens and moors. And so, the world in the Koztanza.

ABRAZZA--Ay, plenty of dead-desert chapters there; horrible sands to wade through.

MEDIA--Now, Babbalanja, away with your tropes; and tell us of the work, directly it was done. What did Lombardo then? Did he show it to any one for an opinion?

BABBALANJA--Yes, to Zenzori; who asked him where he picked up so much trash; to Hanto, who bade him not be cast down, it was pretty good; to Lucree, who desired to know how much he was going to get for it; to Roddi, who offered a suggestion.

MEDIA--And what was that?

BABBALANJA--That he had best make a faggot of the whole; and try again.

ABRAZZA--Very encouraging.

MEDIA--Any one else?

BABBALANJA--To Pollo; who, conscious his opinion was sought, was thereby puffed up; and marking the faltering of Lombardo's voice, when the manuscript was handed him, straightway concluded, that the man who stood thus trembling at the bar, must needs be inferior to the judge. But his verdict was mild. After sitting up all night over the work; and diligently taking notes:--"Lombardo, my friend! here, take your sheets. I have run through them loosely. You might have done better; but then you might have done worse. Take them, my friend; I have put in some good things for you:"

MEDIA--And who was Pollo?

BABBALANJA--Probably some one who lived in Lombardo's time, and went by that name. He is incidentally mentioned, and cursorily immortalized in one of the posthumous notes to the *Koztanza*.

MEDIA--What is said of him there?

BABBALANJA--Not much. In a very old transcript of the work--that of Aldina--the note alludes to a brave line in the text, and runs thus:--  
"Diverting to tell, it was this passage that an old prosodist, one Pollo, claimed for his own. He maintained he made a free-will offering of it to Lombardo. Several things are yet extant of this Pollo, who died some weeks ago. He seems to have been one of those, who would do great things if they could; but are content to compass the small. He imagined, that the precedence of authors he had established in his library, was their Mardi order of merit. He condemned the sublime poems of Vavona to his lowermost shelf. 'Ah,' thought he, 'how we library princes, lord it over these beggarly authors!' Well read in the history of their woes, Pollo pitied them all, particularly the famous; and wrote little essays of his own, which he read to himself."

MEDIA--Well: and what said Lombardo to those good friends of his,-- Zenzori, Hanto, and Roddi?

BABBALANJA--Nothing. Taking home his manuscript, he glanced it over; making three corrections.

ABRAZZA--And what then?

BABBALANJA--Then, your Highness, he thought to try a conclave of professional critics; saying to himself, "Let them privately point out to me, now, all my blemishes; so that, what time they come to review



me in public, all will be well." But curious to relate, those professional critics, for the most part, held their peace, concerning a work yet unpublished. And, with some generous exceptions, in their vague, learned way, betrayed such base, beggarly notions of authorship, that Lombardo could have wept, had tears been his. But in his very grief, he ground his teeth. Muttered he, "They are fools. In their eyes, bindings not brains make books. They criticise my tattered cloak, not my soul, caparisoned like a charger. He is the great author, think they, who drives the best bargain with his wares: and no bargainer am I. Because he is old, they worship some mediocrity of an ancient, and mock at the living prophet with the live coal on his lips. They are men who would not be men, had they no books. Their sires begat them not; but the authors they have read. Feelings they have none: and their very opinions they borrow. They can not say yea, nor nay, without first consulting all Mardi as an Encyclopedia. And all the learning in them, is as a dead corpse in a coffin. Were they worthy the dignity of being damned, I would damn them; but they are not. Critics?--Asses! rather mules!--so emasculated, from vanity, they can not father a true thought. Like mules, too, from dunghills, they trample down gardens of roses: and deem that crushed fragrance their own.--Oh! that all round the domains of genius should lie thus unhedged, for such cattle to uproot! Oh! that an eagle should be stabbed by a goose-quill! But at best, the greatest reviewers but prey on my leavings. For I am critic and creator; and as critic, in cruelty surpass all critics merely, as a tiger, jackals. For ere Mardi sees aught of mine, I scrutinize it myself, remorseless as a surgeon. I cut

right and left; I probe, tear, and wrench; kill, burn, and destroy;  
and what's left after that, the jackals are welcome to. It is I that  
stab false thoughts, ere hatched; I that pull down wall and tower,  
rejecting materials which would make palaces for others. Oh! could  
Mardi but see how we work, it would marvel more at our primal chaos,  
than at the round world thence emerging. It would marvel at our  
scaffoldings, scaling heaven; marvel at the hills of earth, banked all  
round our fabrics ere completed.--How plain the pyramid! In this grand  
silence, so intense, pierced by that pointed mass,--could ten thousand  
slaves have ever toiled? ten thousand hammers rung?--There it stands,  
--part of Mardi: claiming kin with mountains;--was this thing piecemeal  
built?--It was. Piecemeal?--atom by atom it was laid. The world is  
made of mites."

YOOMY (musing.)--It is even so.

ABRAZZA--Lombardo was severe upon the critics; and they as much so  
upon him;--of that, be sure.

BABBALANGA--Your Highness, Lombardo never presumed to criticise true  
critics; who are more rare than true poets. A great critic is a sultan  
among satraps; but pretenders are thick as ants, striving to scale a  
palm, after its aerial sweetness. And they fight among themselves.  
Essaying to pluck eagles, they themselves are geese, stuck full  
of quills, of which they rob each other.

ABRAZZA (to Media.)--Oro help the victim that falls in Babbalanja's hands!

MEDIA.--Ay, my lord; at times, his every finger is a dagger: every thought a falling tower that whelms! But resume, philosopher--what of Lombardo now?

BABBALANJA--"For this thing," said he, "I have agonized over it enough.--I can wait no more. It has faults--all mine;--its merits all its own;--but I can toil no longer. The beings knit to me implore; my heart is full; my brain is sick. Let it go--let it go--and Oro with it. Somewhere Mardi has a mighty heart---that struck, all the isles shall resound!"

ABRAZZA--Poor devil! he took the world too hard.

MEDIA.-As most of these mortals do, my lord. That's the load, self-imposed, under which Babbalanja reels. But now, philosopher, ere Mardi saw it, what thought Lombardo of his work, looking at it objectively, as a thing out of him, I mean.

ABRAZZA--No doubt, he hugged it.

BABBALANJA--Hard to answer. Sometimes, when by himself, he thought hugely of it, as my lord Abrazza says; but when abroad, among men, he almost despised it; but when he bethought him of those parts, written

with full eyes, half blinded; temples throbbing; and pain at the heart--

ABRAZZA--Pooh! pooh!

BABBALANJA--He would say to himself, "Sure, it can not be in vain!" Yet again, when he bethought him of the hurry and bustle of Mardi, dejection stole over him. "Who will heed it," thought he; "what care these fops and brawlers for me? But am I not myself an egregious coxcomb? Who will read me? Say one thousand pages--twenty-five lines each--every line ten words--every word ten letters. That's two million five hundred thousand a's, and i's, and o's to read! How many are superfluous? Am I not mad to saddle Mardi with such a task? Of all men, am I the wisest, to stand upon a pedestal, and teach the mob? Ah, my own Kortanza! child of many prayers!--in whose earnest eyes, so fathomless, I see my own; and recall all past delights and silent agonies--thou may'st prove, as the child of some fond dotard:--beauteous to me; hideous to Mardi! And methinks, that while so much slaving merits that thou should'st not die; it has not been intense, prolonged enough, for the high meed of immortality. Yet, things immortal have been written; and by men as me;--men, who slept and waked; and ate; and talked with tongues like mine. Ah, Oro! how may we know or not, we are what we would be? Hath genius any stamp and imprint, obvious to possessors? Has it eyes to see itself; or is it blind? Or do we delude ourselves with being gods, and end in grubs? Genius, genius?--a thousand years hence, to be a household-word?--I?--

Lombardo? but yesterday cut in the market-place by a spangled fool!--  
Lombardo immortal?--Ha, ha, Lombardo! but thou art an ass, with vast  
ears brushing the tops of palms! Ha, ha, ha! Methinks I see thee  
immortal! 'Thus great Lombardo saith; and thus; and thus; and thus:--  
thus saith he--illustrious Lombardo!--Lombardo, our great countryman!  
Lombardo, prince of poets--Lombardo! great Lombardo!--Ha, ha, ha!--  
go, go! dig thy grave, and bury thyself!"

ABRAZZA--He was very funny, then, at times.

BABBALANJA--Very funny, your Highness:--amazing jolly! And from my  
nethermost soul, would to Oro, thou could'st but feel one touch of  
that jolly woe! It would appall thee, my Right Worshipful lord  
Abrazza!

ABRAZZA (to Media)--My dear lord, his teeth are marvelously white  
and sharp: some she-shark must have been his dam:--does he often grin  
thus? It was infernal!

MEDIA--Ah! that's Azzageddi. But, prithee, Babbalanja, proceed.

BABBALANJA--Your Highness, even in his calmer critic moods, Lombardo  
was far from fancying his work. He confesses, that it ever seemed to  
him but a poor scrawled copy of something within, which, do what he  
would, he could not completely transfer. "My canvas was small," said  
he; "crowded out were hosts of things that came last. But Fate is in

it." And Fate it was, too, your Highness, which forced Lombardo, ere his work was well done, to take it off his easel, and send it to be multiplied. "Oh, that I was not thus spurred!" cried he; "but like many another, in its very childhood, this poor child of mine must go out into Mardi, and get bread for its sire."

ABRAZZA (with a sigh)--Alas, the poor devil! But methinks 'twas wondrous arrogant in him to talk to all Mardi at that lofty rate.--Did he think himself a god?

BABBALANJA--He himself best knew what he thought; but, like all others, he was created by Oro to some special end; doubtless, partly answered in his Koztanza.

MEDIA--And now that Lombardo is long dead and gone--and his work, hooted during life, lives after him--what think the present company of it? Speak, my lord Abrazza! Babbalanja! Mohi! Yoomy!

ABRAZZA (tapping his sandal with his scepter)--I never read it.

BABBALANJA (looking upward)--It was written with a divine intent.

Mohi (stroking his beard)--I never hugged it in a corner, and ignored it before Mardi.

Yoomy (musing)--It has bettered my heart.

MEDIA (rising)--And I have read it through nine times.

BABBALANJA (starting up)--Ah, Lombardo! this must make thy ghost  
glad!